

# MEDIA LITERACY

Thinking Critically About

THE INTERNET

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# Contents

<i>To the Teacher</i> - - - - -	v
<i>To the Student</i> - - - - -	vi

## **Unit 1 The History and Future of the Internet - - - - - 1**

Teacher Buzz - - - - -	1
Internet Buzz - - - - -	2
Activity 1: Is Internet a Proper Noun? - - - - -	3
Activity 2: Computers Everywhere, in Everything - - - - -	4
Activity 3: The Flexible Monitor - - - - -	5
Activity 4: Lost Languages - - - - -	6
Activity 5: Neologisms - - - - -	8
Activity 6: Beaver College Versus the Internet - - - - -	10
Activity 7: Distance Education - - - - -	12
Activity 8: Technological Unemployment - - - - -	14
Activity 9: Viruses - - - - -	16
Activity 10: The Changing Concept of Privacy - - - - -	19
Activity 11: Cyber Crime - - - - -	22
Activity 12: Will the Internet Become a Necessity? - - - - -	25

## **Unit 2 The Internet and Society - - - - - 27**

Teacher Buzz - - - - -	27
Internet Buzz - - - - -	29
Activity 1: El Internet: Latinos and the Internet - - - - -	30
Activity 2: The Age Gap - - - - -	33
Activity 3: Is the Internet Accessible to People with Disabilities? - - - - -	34
Activity 4: The Dumb Computer - - - - -	36
Activity 5: Voting on the Internet - - - - -	38
Activity 6: Criminal Registries - - - - -	40
Activity 7: How Is the Internet Changing Society? - - - - -	42
Activity 8: Cyberporn - - - - -	44
Activity 9: Tensions in the Library - - - - -	47
Activity 10: Cyber Crud - - - - -	49
Activity 11: Can History Be Rewritten? - - - - -	51
Activity 12: Hoaxes and Urban Legends - - - - -	52
Activity 13: Hate Sites - - - - -	54
Activity 14: Cheatin' - - - - -	56

Activity 15: On-line Doctors - - - - - 57

**Unit 3 The Internet and Business - - - - - 59**

Teacher Buzz - - - - - 59

Internet Buzz - - - - - 61

    Activity 1: Portals: Where Do You Start? - - - - - 62

    Activity 2: The Demographics of Doritos - - - - - 64

    Activity 3: The Psychographics of Sprite - - - - - 66

    Activity 4: Privacy Policies - - - - - 68

    Activity 5: Spam - - - - - 70

    Activity 6: Deregulation - - - - - 72

    Activity 7: The World Wide Web’s Life Cycle - - - - - 74

    Activity 8: The Domain Name Game - - - - - 77

    Activity 9: What Happens to the Mom-and-Pop Store? - - - - - 79

    Activity 10: Is Anybody Clicking? - - - - - 81

    Activity 11: The Internet and the Job Market - - - - - 83

    Activity 12: Credit Cards and the Internet - - - - - 84

    Activity 13: Whither AOL? - - - - - 86

**Unit 4 The Internet and You - - - - - 89**

Teacher Buzz - - - - - 89

Internet Buzz - - - - - 90

    Activity 1: Blogs - - - - - 91

    Activity 2: Parental Controls - - - - - 93

    Activity 3: Safe Chat - - - - - 95

    Activity 4: Defamation - - - - - 96

    Activity 5: Downloading, Part I - - - - - 98

    Activity 6: Downloading, Part II - - - - - 100

    Activity 7: Downloading, Part III - - - - - 101

    Activity 8: Buying a Car - - - - - 102

    Activity 9: Choosing a College, Choosing a Career - - - - - 104

    Activity 10: For Whom Do I Vote? - - - - - 106

    Activity 11: The FBI’s Carnivore - - - - - 108

Glossary - - - - - 109

Additional Resources - - - - - 110

## To the Teacher

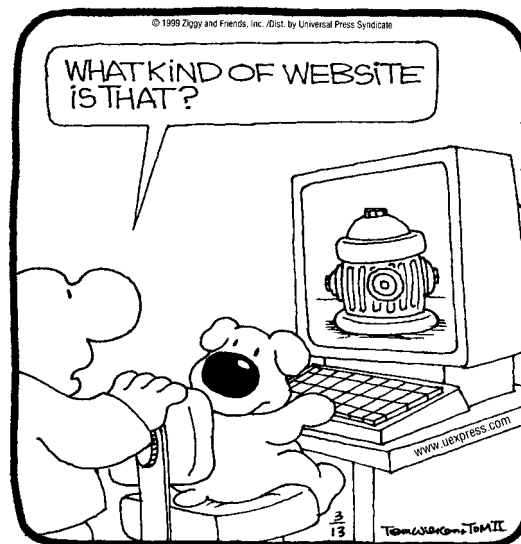
**ACCORDING TO JEFFREY I. COLE**, Director of the UCLA Center for Communication Policy and founder of the World Internet Project:

Understanding how people use the Internet is even more important than understanding the impact of television. While television is primarily about our leisure time, the Internet is already transforming work, school and play. Virtually every business, political and social activity will be affected by the Internet, and most activities will be dramatically transformed. Child rearing, consumer behavior, education, politics and religion are being changed dramatically by the Internet; these changes have unprecedented effects on our culture that need to be better understood.

This book, the fifth in a series that helps students develop critical-thinking skills through media literacy, focuses on the Internet. The guiding principle of this book is that the Internet can be used to teach critical-thinking skills. The units in

this book provide students with information about the Internet as an entertainment medium, as a business, and as a source of social and cultural exchange. The activities require students to describe this new information and apply it in varied exercises. Students will analyze and evaluate how the Internet affects their lives and the lives of others. They will encounter ethical considerations and discuss issues of gender, age, and race. Students are also provided opportunities to use their own creativity and ideas in Internet applications. Ultimately, this book strives to make students more informed and more discerning Internet users.

The Internet's rapid diffusion and its sharply escalating impact on society make it difficult to assemble materials about the Internet that do not quickly become dated. With this in mind, an effort has been made to develop activities in this book that focus on "big picture" aspects of the Internet rather than current fads and short-lived phenomena.



## To the Student

THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATION COMMISSION recently found that “Seventy-two percent of Americans are now on-line and spend an average of nine hours weekly on the Internet.” This book presumes that you have some familiarity with the Internet, and that some readers are “power users.” Many of you are probably the

most knowledgeable users of the Internet in your home. If you already know a lot about the Internet, this book will challenge you instead of insult your intelligence. If you do not know as much about the Internet as you would like, this book will help you explore and learn.

Many of the activities in this book require you to use the Internet to find information. The best way to begin looking for information on the Internet is to start with a **search engine**. The following are just a few of the more useful search engines available:

- Alfa Seek      [www.alfaseek.com](http://www.alfaseek.com)
- Ask Jeeves     [www.ask.com](http://www.ask.com)
- Alta Vista     [www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com)
- Excite         [www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com)
- Google        [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

Search engines typically use Boolean logic. George Boole (1815–1864) was a British mathematician and logician whose work has been used to develop patterns to search for information on the Internet. The four most common operators (symbols or words) used in a Boolean search are as follows:

+ Using this symbol between search terms will take you only to those web sites that contain all of those words. For example, typing Cleveland +LeBron +James at a search engine will create a list of web sites that contain all those words.

– Using this symbol allows you to look for web sites that contain a word or phrase but not another. For example, typing Cleveland – LeBron will create a list of web sites that contain the word Cleveland but not LeBron James.

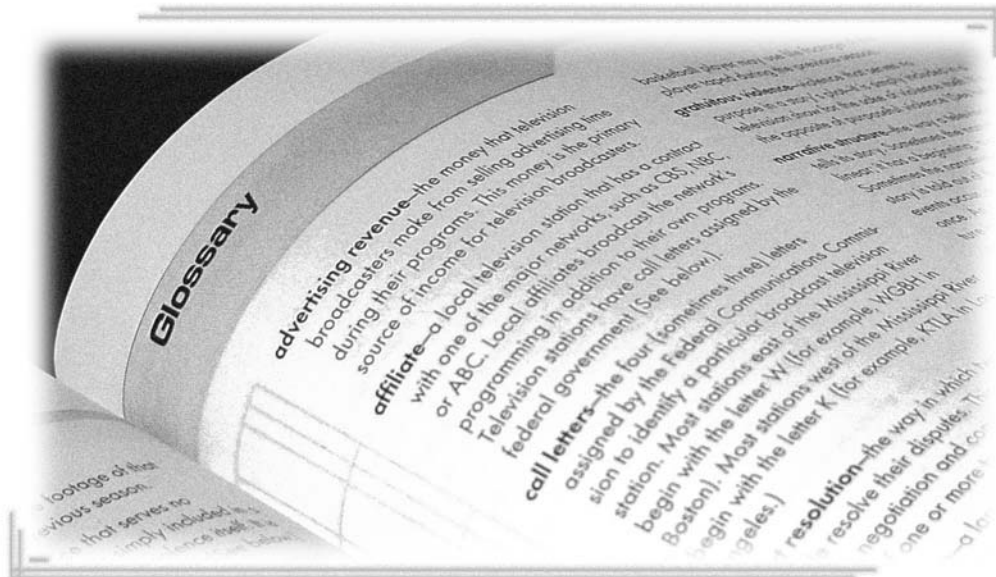
OR Using this word will find sites that have any of two or more words. For example, typing Cleveland OR LeBron OR basketball will find all the sites that have one or more of those words.

## To the Student

"" Placing a phrase or sentence within quotation marks will take you only to sites where those words appear exactly as quoted. For example, typing "LeBron James' Nike contract" will create a list of web sites where that exact phrase appears.

There are probably several words in this book with which you are not familiar. You will find a glossary at the back of the book. Words that

are defined in the glossary are highlighted in bold when used in the book.



The objectives of this unit are to help students

- understand the commercial nature of the Internet
- recognize the pervasiveness of commercialism and advertising in American culture
- understand how demographic and psychographic differences operate in American society
- rely on their own creativity and imagination in generating strategies for the relatively new medium of the Internet
- develop their knowledge of financial and economic matters
- use problem-solving skills in a variety of contexts

**THE INTERNET** began as a noncommercial medium but was soon embraced by the marketplace. Teenagers are attractive to producers of consumer goods and services; these firms are aggressively exploiting teenagers' fascination with the Internet. One of the primary purposes of this unit is to help students become better informed and more discerning consumers.

You are likely familiar with the growing body of research that demonstrates the importance of helping students identify career choices beginning at approximately the age of twelve. The second major purpose of this unit is to expand students' awareness about career opportunities in Internet-related businesses as well as other areas of commerce.

#### **In this Unit. . .**

**Portals: Where Do You Start?** offers students the chance to develop and design a web portal that would be attractive and interesting to teenagers.

**The Demographics of Doritos** provides information about the snack food maker's efforts to use the Internet to capture the attention of teenagers, and asks students to evaluate the efficacy of those efforts.

**The Psychographics of Sprite** has students focus on how businesses use the interactivity of the Internet to study teenagers' values and attitudes.

**Privacy Policies** has students investigate how the Internet helps businesses gather personal data about Internet users.

**Spam** focuses on recent efforts to combat unsolicited e-mail and asks students to appraise both the merits of spam and proposed regulations dealing with spam.

**Deregulation** introduces students to a recent decision by the Federal Communications Commission that allows increased concentration of ownership of media outlets. Students assess the need for diversity of viewpoints in society and the role of the Internet in promoting diversity.

*(continued)*

### Teacher Buzz *(continued)*

**The World Wide Web's Life Cycle** provides information about the product life cycle and asks students to anticipate the future of some types of Internet businesses.

**The Domain Name Game** offers a case study that requires students to identify relevant facts. This activity also provides the opportunity for students to use their creativity as they generate new names for web sites.

**What Happens to the Mom-and-Pop Store?** provides students with the opportunity to explore the economic impact the Internet has on small businesses.

**Is Anybody Clicking?** asks students to appraise Internet advertisers' efforts to generate consumer

response and has students identify successful advertising practices.

**The Internet and the Job Market** focuses on the Internet's ability to shift jobs, and requires students to analyze the ethics of substituting prisoners and overseas workers for current United States wage earners.

**Credit Cards and the Internet** has students assess the Internet's effect on consumer debt.

**Whither AOL?** calls for creative problem solving. AOL needs to change its delivery method in order to survive; students decide what AOL should do. Students also interpret a graph to ascertain stock market prices and to assess their willingness or aversion to undertaking financial risks.

### Internet Buzz

THERE ARE MANY ways to make money by doing business on the Internet. A **portal** is a site where many people begin their visit on the Internet. Some of the best-known portals include MSN and Yahoo. Portals offer specialized content, such as local weather, television and movie listings, sports scores, and local news. This content gathers an audience for the companies that advertise on those portals.

**“On-line marketplaces bring a group of different sellers and buyers together.”**

them. Music sites allow visitors to download music for a fee. Some content providers allow free downloads and make money by selling advertising at their sites.

Another way of making money on the Internet is to provide content that people will pay for. For example, web sites for newspapers and magazines sell articles to people who want to buy

Virtual storefronts use the Internet to sell products directly to individuals or businesses. Perhaps the best-known example is Amazon.com, which has no traditional stores and sells its products only through the Web. Other companies use a “bricks and clicks” approach. For example, Target and Wal-Mart have actual store buildings that shoppers can visit, and both retailers also sell products on the Internet.

On-line marketplaces bring a group of different sellers and buyers together. These sites include eBay and Priceline.com. These sites make money by charging a commission for their service. This commission is usually a percentage of the price of the items sold on the site.


These are only some of the existing Internet business models. Undoubtedly, new methods of making money on the Internet will arise in the future. This unit examines some of the most common forms of Internet-related businesses. We will also examine how the Internet is affecting non-Internet businesses. In addition, we will explore the impact the Internet may have on your own career.

**Portals: Where Do You Start? -----**

MANY INTERNET USERS have established start pages or home pages where they begin their World Wide Web surfing. Examples include My Yahoo, My Excite, and My MSN. These sites are attractive because they allow users to collect information that is important or interesting, such as local news and weather, television listings for favorite channels, information about favorite entertainers and sports teams, or a daily horoscope. These sites are also called portals, because they are the “door” through which a surfer enters the World Wide Web.

In this exercise, you will design a portal that will be attractive to teenagers. Probably the best way to start is to look at the popular portals listed above—My Yahoo, My Excite, and My MSN. If you use an Internet Service Provider (**ISP**) like AOL or EarthLink, it probably offers a portal site.

1. In the space below, show what categories of information will be available to users. It is probably best to allow users to customize the information they can access within each category. For example, users in different cities may only want to know about the weather in their hometown. Different users will also have different tastes in music, movies, and so forth.



Try to design a portal that is at least as good as the portals currently available. But be creative—try to design a portal that is better than any existing portal. And remember, you want to design a portal that will be interesting to teenagers. A good portal allows users to customize not only information; it also allows users to customize the appearance of the page.

*(continued)*

**Activity 1 (continued)**

**Portals: Where Do You Start? -----**

2. For each category or object available on your portal site, explain below why you want to offer that category or object.

Category/Object	Explanation

3. Explain why your portal would be more attractive to teenagers than currently existing portals.
4. Most portals earn money for their owners by selling advertising space on their portal sites. List three advertisers that you think would want to advertise on your portal site, and explain why.

**The Demographics of Doritos** -----

PEPSICO, the maker of Pepsi, also owns Frito-Lay, the company that makes Doritos. For several years, Doritos were heavily advertised during the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl attracts a huge television audience, so advertisements broadcast during the game are very expensive. In 2002, Doritos dropped its traditional Super Bowl advertising campaign and tripled its Internet advertising budget instead.

**Demographics** are statistics about people grouped by such information as age, gender, ethnicity, geography, and income. Businesses, such as Frito-Lay, study demographics to determine the **target market** for their product. Doritos' target market is twelve- to twenty-four-year-olds, and is more likely to be male than female.

According to Jonathan Glicksberg, director of client services at Atmosphere, Doritos' Internet advertising agency, "The teen target has a lot of skepticism toward marketing activities on-line, but if we align with the content they're interested in—entertainment, music, games—it allows us to engage with them in a more meaningful way."

1. Visit the Doritos web site ([www.doritos.com](http://www.doritos.com)). List and describe three ways that the Doritos web site tries to attract and keep your interest.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What information about you does the Doritos site try to get?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why do you think the company that makes Doritos wants this information?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Describe how you think the company that makes Doritos uses this information.

*(continued)*

**The Demographics of Doritos -----**

Doritos spends much more money on Internet advertising than most other companies that make food products—about nine percent of its total annual advertising budget, as compared to an industry average of about one to two percent.

5. Do you think the people who handle Doritos’s advertising made the right decision when they decided to discontinue their Super Bowl advertisements and spend the money on Internet advertising instead? Explain why or why not.

Cammie Dunaway, who was in charge of marketing Frito-Lay’s products to children and teens, said, “We want to make sure teens are talking about and thinking about Doritos all the time, and it is impossible to do that without having a significant presence on-line.”

6. Do you agree or disagree with Dunaway? Explain why or why not.

**The Psychographics of Sprite** -----

OF COURSE, Doritos is hardly the only product on the Internet that is aimed at teenagers. Advertising on the Internet takes two basic forms: advertising banners and web sites maintained by an advertiser. For example, suppose you are reading a news story at a portal, such as MSN.com. The MSN site may have a banner advertisement for Abercrombie and Fitch—even though you were not looking for information about clothing, you have now seen the advertisement. Often, a banner advertisement is a **click-through**. This means that if you click on the banner advertisement you will be led to Abercrombie and Fitch’s own web site ([www.abercrombie.com](http://www.abercrombie.com)). A company can track the number of click-throughs that different banner advertisements generate. This is the value of **interactivity** to the company—it now knows what types of advertisements work and what types to avoid.

Abercrombie and Fitch’s web site is publicized in the company’s magazine advertisements and in promotional displays in its stores. The web site allows you to shop on-line. It also includes music downloads, photographs of models, e-mail postcards that you can send to friends, and other items. These features are also interactive. For example, if many visitors to the site click on one type of postcard, but not another, the company learns what types of pictures are popular with its consumers and what types of pictures are not.

Sprite’s web site ([www.sprite.com](http://www.sprite.com)) allows visitors to play video games, listen to and remix music, and enter contests. If someone believes that he or she can have fun at the Sprite web site, he or she will visit the site. While at the site, a visitor is exposed to several advertisements for Sprite and other products. Visitors can get information about new products and find out about their favorite NBA star or musical group. Sprite carefully studies what is and is not popular with visitors based on which activities visitors take part in or avoid. For example, if a feature on a certain hip-hop artist at the Sprite web site gets a lot of hits, Sprite knows that the artist is still popular with Sprite drinkers. Sprite will continue to feature that artist at its web site and in other advertisements. If another artist gets only a few hits, Sprite knows that it needs to search for other, more popular artists to include in its advertising.

The owners of Abercrombie and Fitch and Coca-Cola, the owner of Sprite, know who their target demographic group is—teenagers. Both companies also study the **psychographics** of their target market. Psychographics are statistics about people grouped by their interests, attitudes, values, and habits (including buying habits). Most teenagers would not let older adults choose their music or clothes for them. In order to get you to buy their products, the adults at Abercrombie and Fitch need to find out what you are into, as does Sprite. The interactivity of the Internet helps them do this.

*(continued)*

## **The Psychographics of Sprite -----**

Record your answers below. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. Visit the Abercrombie and Fitch web site and the Sprite web site. You are a teenager. Abercrombie and Fitch wants your attention, as does Sprite. After visiting their web sites, do you think these companies did a good job or not? Explain why or why not.
2. Do the owners of the Abercrombie and Fitch web site seem to understand what people your age are interested in now? Or is the site out of date? Explain your answer.
3. Pina Scarra, the director of youth brands for Sprite, said that Sprite wants teenagers to think, "You know, Sprite understands me. Sprite is . . . one of us." After looking at the Sprite web site, do you think Scarra has done a good job? Explain why or why not.
4. Interactivity allows Internet users to tell the owners of web sites how they feel about things. This may be especially important to teenagers, who are learning about independence and becoming their own person. Do you feel that the interactivity of web sites like Sprite's and Abercrombie and Fitch's gives you more power? Explain why or why not.
5. Surveys tell us that Abercrombie and Fitch is currently the store most often named by American teenagers as their favorite clothing store. Abercrombie and Fitch does not advertise on television. Do you think that Abercrombie and Fitch's decision not to advertise on television while maintaining an interactive Internet site has helped the company gain favor among teenagers? Explain why or why not.

**Privacy Policies**-----

THE FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION (FTC), a government agency, has created (and enforces) laws dealing with various privacy issues. For example, the FTC protects privacy regarding health care—your doctor, pharmacist, and insurance company need to know your medical history, but your neighbor should not. The FTC also works to protect financial information, such as bank records.

In 1998, the FTC enacted the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Rule, under the direction of Congress. This rule applies to operators of commercial web sites and on-line services directed to children under the age of thirteen, and to general audience web sites and on-line services that knowingly collect personal information from children under thirteen. Among other things, the rule requires that web sites get consent from a parent or guardian before the web sites can collect personal information from children.

What happens when someone turns thirteen? Does she or he still have privacy rights when surfing the Web? The short answer is yes, but in truth, it is not that simple. Commercial web sites must have a privacy policy. There is usually a link to these privacy policies on the bottom of a web site’s front page. However, it has been found that few people actually check a web site’s privacy policy. In addition, the requirement for a privacy policy is only that there must be a privacy policy—this policy does *not* have to be one that actually protects you! A web site’s privacy policy can actually be that the site makes no effort to truly protect a visitor’s privacy, if the visitor is at least thirteen years old.

Many web sites also place a **cookie** on your computer. That cookie identifies you to the web site when you return to it, or to other web sites that share cookies with one another.

Answer the following questions. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

Click on one of the web sites that you visit the most. Look at the bottom of its front (or start) page for a link to its privacy policy. Click on the link, and read the privacy policy.

1. Do you understand everything that the privacy policy tells you?
  - Explain your answer, giving three examples from the privacy policy (these examples can be things you do understand or that you do not understand).

(continued)

**Privacy Policies** -----

2. After reviewing this privacy policy, do you feel comfortable that the owner of the web site is protecting your privacy? Explain why or why not.
  
3. With whom, if anybody, does the owner of the web site share information about you?
  - Are you comfortable with this sharing? Explain why or why not.
  
4. Why do you think the web site owner wants personal information about you? Explain your answer.
  
5. What does the privacy policy tell you about the web site's use of cookies?
  - Do you understand how the web site uses cookies? Explain why or why not.
  
6. Do you think the average adult is aware how, or if, his or her privacy is protected when that person surfs the Internet? Explain why or why not.

**Spam** -----

YOU PROBABLY already know that *spam* is bulk unsolicited e-mail. *Bulk* means that the e-mail was sent to many (perhaps millions) of people at one time. *Unsolicited* means that the recipients of the e-mail did not ask to receive e-mail from the sender. For example, if Juan visits a travel web site and asks to be placed on a subscription list for low cost airfares, e-mails from the travel web site about low cost airfares are not spam. This is because Juan asked to receive those e-mails. However, if Patti receives e-mail from a company she has never heard of before offering to sell her something, that is spam because Patti did not ask for the e-mail.

Many companies rent their mailing lists. These include people's addresses for United States mail and e-mail. For example, if you subscribe to a magazine, chances are that the magazine is paid by other companies to send mailings to you. Similarly, if you register your e-mail address at a web site, the owner of that web site may receive money from other companies to send you unsolicited e-mails.

Many people are aggravated by spam, and have asked Congress to pass laws to control it. However, there are differences of opinion about what types of activities should be prohibited or required by anti-spam legislation. One proposal is called an *opt out* plan, which means that if someone receives an unsolicited e-mail, that person should be able to ask the sender to take him or her off the list of recipients of future e-mail from that sender.

Currently, many spammers' e-mails seem to offer a chance to opt out. However, some spammers are dishonest about the "opt out" choice. Instead, they fraudulently offer the "opt out" choice to see if people will respond. Suppose Wesley gets an unsolicited e-mail that offers a chance to opt out by clicking on an "unsubscribe" link. When Wesley clicks on the link, he is telling the sender that his e-mail address is active. Some dishonest spammers will then see this as encouragement to continue sending spam to Wesley. Presumably, any new law that requires spammers to give e-mail users the chance to unsubscribe will require spammers to actually take those people off their subscription lists.

Some members of the public are asking Congress to pass antispamming laws that require e-mail users to "opt in" before receiving e-mails. This would include the situation above in which Juan asked the travel web site to alert him about low cost airfares. However, many legitimate companies rely on unsolicited e-mails to sell their products and services. They argue that the only way they can expand their business is to be able to solicit business from people who may need their product or service but do not yet know about the company sending the e-mail. These companies argue that an "opt in" requirement would hurt or even ruin them. Unsolicited e-mail is not only sent by for-profit businesses. Many not-for-profit groups, including charitable organizations, send unsolicited e-mails to help raise money for charitable and other social needs.

(continued)

**Spam** -----

Record your answers below. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary.

1. Describe the difference between an "opt out" requirement for spam and an "opt in."
2. Which requirement do you think is a better idea for consumers? Explain your answer.
3. Describe a major advantage to the public that results from unsolicited e-mails.
4. Describe a major disadvantage to the public that results from unsolicited e-mails.
5. Most people have received "junk mail," or unsolicited advertisements, through the United States mail ("snail mail") for years. Why do you think that many people are more upset about spam than they are about junk mail that is more traditional?